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THE ARCHIVES OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.

By WALDO G. LELAND.

(Read before the Society, March 11, 1907.)

In its broadest sense the term "archives of the federal government" may be used to designate that vast body of documents, printed or in manuscript, constituted by the records and files of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the national government. Not only are the records of those offices located at the seat of government included in the federal archives, but also the records of all local offices administered by the national government, no matter where they may be situated. Thus the records of all post-offices, customs-houses, sub-treasuries, mints, land offices, army posts, navy yards, federal courts, quarantine and immigrant stations, weather bureaus, and internal revenue offices, to mention the more important of the local branches of the various governmental departments, are quite as properly a part of the federal archives as are the collection of original treaties with foreign powers or the volumes of diplomatic correspondence so carefully preserved in the Department of State. Among the federal archives are included, as has been suggested, documents in print as well as those which are still to be found only in manuscript. Thus the Statutes at Large, the Congressional Record, the annual reports, with their accompanying documents, of the heads of the executive departments, together with that great mass of material, infinitely varied in value, at once the hope and the despair of the investigator,

known as the Congressional Documents, belong as truly among the archives as do any of the volumes or boxes of manuscripts. Indeed, owing to their rarity, many published documents have nearly the character of manuscripts, as for example the valuable but little known series of Bills and Resolutions, of which I believe not a single complete set is to be found, or the documents of the first fourteen Congresses, a complete series of which has at last, after long continued efforts been collected by the Library of Congress. It is evident that even a brief survey of the field thus indicated would extend much beyond the limits of a paper appropriate in length to the present occasion. I propose then to deal this evening only with the manuscript records of those offices of the executive departments of the national government that are situated within the District of Columbia. It is with regret that I thus exclude from present consideration the extremely interesting but almost unknown archives, still unprinted, of the Senate and House of Representatives, the records of the Supreme Court and Court of Claims, the few groups of papers in the Smithsonian Institution, and the increasingly important collections of the Library of Congress. The importance of the records and files of the executive departments, the comparative difficulty of investigation in them, owing to the multiplicity of depositories, and the problems in archive administration that they present, all combine however to justify the limited construction that I propose to give to my subject, "The Archives of the Federal Government." Let us first then consider the general situation as regards the archives of the executive departments, their history and administration, passing later to a more particular consideration, especially as regards historical utility, of the records of the more im-

portant offices and bureaus of each of the departments.

In the first place we are impressed with the fact that there is no general body of archives, no central depository, no Public Record Office, no Archives Nationales. Instead, each department administers its own records, and within each department it is the general rule that the various bureaus preserve their own archives; nor does the subdivision end here, unfortunately, for in many bureaus the various divisions, sections or other offices that constitute the bureau have each their own file rooms. Thus it results that the archives of the executive departments are to be found scattered among something over a hundred depositories. Such a situation would be sufficiently discouraging to the investigator, had each office that thus preserves its own records enjoyed a continued existence from the organization of the government, or performed always the same duties. Such, however, is far from being the case. Duties have been transferred from one department to another, or from one office to another within the same department, old offices have been abolished, new ones created, in short the entire organization of the government has been in a nearly constant state of change and development since 1789. If it becomes difficult, then, to trace the history of the administration of any particular function, it is frequently far more difficult to locate the records of that administration. In theory and in law they have followed the function about from office to office, from department to department, but in practice it has too often happened that a disregard of their value has caused them to be overlooked or forgotten.

The administration of the records is no more uniform, among these multiple depositories, than would be expected after a consideration of the circumstances that have just been set forth. Of general regulation

by statute little more has been done than to prohibit the removal of documents from their respective depositories, to provide for the destruction of so-called "useless papers," and more recently to authorize the transfer to the Library of Congress of such material as, having purely historical value, is no longer useful in the transaction of public business.

Regulation by departmental or executive orders has gone somewhat farther but has been mainly concerned with methods of preparing the records, the quality of ink or paper, and the system of indexing and filing the documents. Such regulations are of first importance, but they apply, not to the vast accumulations of the past, but to the records and files of the future; so that they concern the investigator of the present day only as he looks with unenvious joy over the promised land which is reserved for the occupation of the unborn generations. Except in one or two noteworthy cases, which will be dwelt on later, departmental regulation has not had in view the securing of an orderly, well arranged body of historical archives, which should include the earliest records and which should be accessible for legitimate purposes of investigation.

Efforts have not, however, been lacking to secure a general and adequate administration of the archives. The establishment of a Hall of Records has been urgently recommended, both by heads of executive departments and by committees of Congress, at frequent intervals since 1879. In 1887, an ex-officio commission was directed to prepare a report on the archives with especial reference to such of them as should be published, but it does not appear that this commission ever came together, thus demonstrating the futility of any ex-officio attempts to deal with the problem.* In 1900,

* Senate document, 236; 57 Congress, 1 session.

identical bills were introduced in the Senate and in the House calling upon the American Historical Association to investigate the character and condition of the public records of the United States, and to report to Congress the results of such investigation.* The bill passed the Senate but in the House, although favorably reported by the Committee on the Library, shared the fate of much other worthy legislation and was lost at the end of the session. The report of the committee, to which reference has just been made, is, however, well worth our attention.†

“A cursory examination of the condition of the national archives at Washington,” so the report reads, “has convinced your committee that the improvement of the conditions which have for a long time prevailed ought no longer to be delayed. Documents of the utmost legal importance, affecting personal and governmental interests of great magnitude, are scattered about among the different Executive Departments and bureaus, and are often stored under conditions which not only make access to them difficult, but also open the way to the mutilation or loss of the documents themselves. With the exception of the military and naval records, no sufficient provision has yet been made by law for preserving this material or for making it accessible to those having a right to use it. Moreover, records relating to the same general subject are in some cases divided between two or more custodians, while important portions of valuable papers are not infrequently found to have disappeared altogether, or to be in the possession of some individual or society in another part of the country. Where one would naturally expect system and unity, there too often prevails,

* House bill, 11,429; 56 Congress, 1 session.

† House report, 1,767; 56 Congress, 1 session.

as there has long prevailed, much diversity. Your committee feel that they do not state the case too strongly in saying that at present no lawyer or historical student desiring to consult the archives of the National Government can feel in advance any assurance that the papers to which he wishes access are to be found in the place in Washington where they would naturally be supposed to be, or even that they are actually in the possession of the United States at all. Only by long and detailed correspondence, or by coming to the national capital and making the rounds of the different departments and depositories can the material in question commonly be got at; and even after this expenditure of time and money and labor the documents sought may turn out to have been lost, or the custody of them vested in somebody else."

The committee then proceeds to dwell upon the "impairment, loss or dispersion of the national records" indicating the unsuitable, even unsafe accommodations too often afforded them, a matter of which I propose presently to speak more fully, and continues, "there can be no need of argument to show that the legal and historical papers of the United States should no longer be scattered about a number of bureaus which for the time being happen to have the custody of them, or held under conditions which make possible impairment or loss, and made available for use only to such extent as the courtesy of the custodians, unaided by suitable appropriations, succeed in achieving. There should certainly be some place at the national capital where the records of the national government can assuredly be found, where they can be dealt with in a manner befitting their inestimable importance, and where those who have occasion to consult them can be provided with suitable facilities and be assured that

they have before them all the material that there is on the particular subject in hand."

It remained for private enterprise to take the first logical step towards the proper treatment of the archives as a body of historical material, namely the preparation of an inventory of them. In the report of the Advisory Committee on History* made in 1902 to the then newly established Carnegie Institution of Washington the recommendation was made that, "first of all, in logical order, should be executed a comprehensive and detailed examination of the government archives, resulting in the preparation of a monumental report upon the vast store of manuscript materials for American history, now preserved in Washington." By way of beginning the preparation of such a report a preliminary survey was undertaken by the Carnegie Institution, the result of which was published in a volume bearing the title of "Guide to the Archives of the Federal Government at Washington."† Thus while the problem of the investigator is somewhat simplified by the existence of the "Guide," the general archive situation remains practically unchanged except in two respects: the Library of Congress has received from some of the departments considerable bodies of material of especial historical value, and in the Department of War the historical records have been placed under a single administration.

Reference has already been made to the dangers to

* The report of this committee, which consisted of Messrs. J. F. Jameson, C. F. Adams and A. C. McLaughlin, is printed in Year Book No. 1 of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1902.

† This volume, which was commenced under the general guidance of Mr. Worthington C. Ford, was completed by the Department of Historical Research of the Carnegie Institution, and published in 1904 as Publication No. 14 of the Carnegie Institution. A revised and considerably enlarged edition is being issued (1908) as Carnegie Institution Publication No. 92.

which the records are exposed in many of the depositories. This is due, not to lack of care or industry on the part of the individual custodians, but entirely to the failure of Congress, in spite of continued urgings and repeated warnings, to provide proper accommodations for the archives. When we reflect that in 1800 most of the records of the War and Navy Departments were destroyed by fire, that in 1833 the same fate befell the records of the Treasury Department, that during the Civil War the archives of the House and Senate were accounted as of no value in the efforts to secure barracks for soldiers in the Capitol, and that in 1877 the Patent Office was destroyed by fire, it does not seem unreasonable to feel both regret and surprise that a neglect which has been in the past attended by such disastrous results, should be persisted in. It becomes evident to the most casual observer that without special accommodations it will continue to be impossible for the archives to receive proper treatment, no matter how great may be the zeal of departmental officials. When it is realized that the public buildings do not begin to afford sufficient space for the official force, it is not surprising that the records have been stored in garrets and cellars, in corridors and storage buildings; in short, in all places where it is clearly impossible to store the clerks themselves. Thus it is that while some records are shrunk with cold in the winter and shrivelled with heat in the summer, others receive the drippings of steam pipes, or collect a rich store of mould or dust which must be removed before binders' titles can be deciphered. It is, of course, understood that by no means all of the archives are thus exposed, nor even a considerable portion, relatively speaking; but it is enough to know that such conditions exist, and that, as the crowding becomes annually greater, large bodies of

material, as yet safely cared for, must eventually be endangered when they are no longer required in the transaction of current business. Another danger, made infinitely greater by the lack of accommodations is that owing to imperative needs for more space, documents will be destroyed as "useless," which have historical value, although no longer needed for official purposes. It does not appear that as yet there have been any serious losses due to authorized destructions, but the narrow escape some years ago of the original census schedules and of a great mass of Confederate material, gives warning that the danger is real and does not exist merely in the imaginings of over-sensitive historians.

Enough, however, has been said respecting the general archive situation and its need of betterment. If too much time appears to have been devoted to their consideration, let me plead, by way of justification, the immediate practical importance of this phase of my subject, and let me observe that it would seem to be especially fitting to emphasize this importance before this Society.

Turning now to the consideration of the archives of the executive branch of the government, regarded as historical sources, we naturally give first attention to the records of the President's office. It has been the custom of all the Presidents upon retiring from office to take with them the papers and records that have accumulated during their respective administrations. The single exception to this practice, an exception which was doubtless accidental, has left in the White House two letter books covering the years 1869 to 1875 of Grant's administrations. The letters in these volumes are not, however, of first importance. They relate to nominations, appointments and resignations, to invitations to attend public functions, and to purely personal matters, such as the purchase of cigars and horses, or

the care of Grant's country estate. In this connection a word respecting the papers of other Presidents may not be inappropriate. Those of Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe and Johnson have been purchased at various times by the government and are now in the Library of Congress. The papers of Jackson were presented to the Library of Congress, which has also acquired many Van Buren and Polk papers. The papers of the Adamses are still in the possession of the Adams family and are deposited with the Massachusetts Historical Society, while the Buchanan papers belong to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and a large section of Polk's papers are in the library of the Chicago Historical Society. It is unfortunate that the nation should not be the possessor of so important a source for the study of its history, without being obliged to purchase or to wait upon the generosity of public-spirited heirs.

The archives of the Department of State have been remarkably well preserved since the organization of that department. They are contained mainly in two depositories, the Bureau of Indexes and Archives and the Bureau of Rolls and Library. In the former are filed the regular series of letters received and sent, while in the latter are more special collections of documents. Unfortunately the line of demarcation is not always sufficiently distinct, and it is frequently found that documents of the same class are divided between the two bureaus without there existing any reason for such a division. In general, however, the diplomatic and consular correspondence and the correspondence of the Secretary of State with government officials and with private persons is filed in the Bureau of Indexes and Archives. This correspondence is arranged in eight principal series. The diplomatic and consular letters

are each in four series: Instructions, or letters to agents abroad; Despatches, or letters from agents abroad; Notes to the Department, being letters from foreign agents in the United States, and Notes from the Department, being letters to foreign agents within the United States. The amount of this material is very considerable, there being about three thousand volumes each of the diplomatic and consular correspondence. Until August, 1906, it was arranged by diplomatic and consular posts, which would seem to be the logical and proper arrangement. This system has since, however, been modified so as to render the current material more readily usable in the course of official business. A very small portion, comparatively speaking, of this material has been printed, it having been found during the course of a detailed examination that only one fourth of the diplomatic correspondence prior to 1828, and that by no means inclusive of nearly all the more important documents, was printed in the series known as *American State Papers*.* The two other principal series in the Bureau of Indexes and Archives are known as *Domestic Letters* and *Miscellaneous Letters*, and fill about fifteen hundred volumes. They contain the correspondence of the Department of State with other than diplomatic and consular officials, the former series being that of the letters sent, the latter, that of the letters received. Here is to be found correspondence with state and territorial governors, with district attorneys, with cabinet officers and with private individuals. In the correspondence with the Department of War will be found, for example, material bearing on the difficulties with Great Britain respecting the northern frontier,

* See A. C. McLaughlin, "Report on the Diplomatic Archives of the Department of State, 1789-1840." Carnegie Institution Publication, No. 22.

or later, letters relating to the government of the insular possessions. Correspondence with the Department of the Navy relates to the suppression of the slave trade, to police service in Asiatic waters, and to many other matters coming within the jurisdiction of both the naval and diplomatic branches of the government. Unfortunately the volumes of letters sent covering the years 1799 to 1802 are missing. In addition to the regular series just described there is preserved in the Bureau of Indexes and Archives a vast amount of very miscellaneous material filling many volumes and bundles, some of which is similar to that preserved in the Bureau of Rolls and Library. Among much that is valueless are found documents of considerable interest, as, for example, several bundles and volumes of papers relating to the domestic secret service during the Civil War, or again a bundle of old cipher codes which may prove of assistance to some future editor of the early diplomatic correspondence.

In the Bureau of Rolls and Library, the other principal depository of the Department of State, are several definite groups of papers and a large body of miscellaneous material. There are regularly filed in this bureau the original laws of the United States, the original treaties with foreign states and with tribes of Indians, letters of ceremony from foreign governments, and the proceedings and other papers of commissions established for the arbitration of international disputes (although by some chance or other much material of this last class happens to have found its way into the Bureau of Indexes and Archives). Here also are preserved such parts of the Washington, Continental Congress and Franklin papers as relate to foreign relations (the balance of those collections, formerly here, having been removed to the Library of Congress) and

the papers prior to about 1870 relating to the administration of the territories. This last collection is of especial interest both from the point of view of the student of territorial administration and from that of the local historian. It includes the proceedings of territorial executives and legislatures, territorial laws and a vast amount of correspondence with territorial governors and secretaries. It contains much material relating to the transfer of the Louisiana Territory, to the establishment of a government therein, to the beginnings of government in the Northwest Territory, to the operations of the War of 1812 in the vicinity of Detroit, and to many other similar matters. It is especially fitting on this occasion to mention the existence among the territorial papers of several volumes of documents relating to the District of Columbia and more especially to the laying out and early government of the city of Washington. Nor should the Alaskan archives, in over seventy-five volumes of Russian manuscript be omitted from our hasty survey.

A large amount of miscellaneous material entirely similar to the corresponding group in the Bureau of Indexes and Archives, relates to a great variety of matters, the execution of Spanish pirates, the arrest of a Russian consul, the South American wars of liberation, the proceedings of the United States legation in Texas from 1842 to 1844, and other subjects. Apparently it would be an advantage were the miscellaneous papers and volumes in the Bureau of Indexes and Archives to be united with the documents just noted.

Passing now to the Department of the Treasury we find a quite different state of affairs; instead of two principal depositories there are twenty or more. Of these the Division of Mail and Files of the Secretary's Office claims first attention for in it are preserved what

are known as the "Secretary's files," that is, the correspondence of the Secretary of the Treasury and the general records of the department as distinguished from the more specialized material in the several bureaus. Reference has already been made to the fire of March, 1833, by which practically all of the Secretary's correspondence was destroyed. The loss was, as may be imagined, irreparable, although in a few cases it has been possible to reconstruct the early volumes of certain series. The correspondence is in two main bodies, the letters sent and the letters received. The former are in two principal groups, those prior to, and those since July 1, 1878. The letters in the earlier group are in duplicate, both press and fair copies having been preserved; they are arranged in several series, according to the officials written to, as Letters to Congress, Letters to the Department of War, etc., or according to the subjects treated, as Customs Letters, Bank Letters, Public Lands Letters, etc. The letters in the later group are preserved only in press copies and are arranged in series corresponding to the divisions into which the Office of the Secretary is organized. The letters received are variously arranged, some being bound in volumes but most being preserved in file cases. They are much less accessible than the letters sent and it has been found necessary to store thousands of volumes and cases in a storage warehouse on E Street, principal dependence being placed for official needs upon a rather complicated register in several hundred volumes. It does not need to be said that there is here much that is interesting and valuable. It is for the most part fresh material, there having been no systematic publication of it. By way of illustration may be mentioned several volumes of communications from banks prior to 1850, among which are included hun-

dreds of charters of banks and trust companies and a voluminous correspondence bearing intimately on that period of unstable banking. Much material is also to be found relating to the Bank of the United States and its dissolution, as well as several hundred volumes devoted to the administration of the customs tariff.

But other depositories in the Department of the Treasury present just claims for brief consideration. In the Division of Book-keeping and Warrants of the Secretary's Office are kept the records of the receipts and expenditures of the government since 1789, that body of material having escaped destruction in the fire of 1833. It is as yet wholly unexplored for it was transferred a few years ago from the office of the Register and has since then, for lack of room, had to be stored in places where it is inaccessible to the investigator. In this same division are to be found the records of the Treasury Department of the Confederate government, together with the consular correspondence of the Confederate State Department and the records of the Commission to Washington, as well as a large amount of papers and records relating to captured and abandoned property in the southern States.

The Office of the Register of the Treasury, at one time the depository of most important archives, contains at present but little of historical interest outside of the "loan office records." These five hundred volumes are the records of the loan offices in the several states from 1784 to 1835, and they consist of ledgers, receipts, subscriptions to stock, statements of the stock comprising the assumed State debts, and other similar material.

The greater part of the records of the office of the Treasurer of the United States were destroyed in 1833, and it is as yet impossible to ascertain the precise char-

acter or completeness of the records from 1833 to 1868. There are several hundred bundles of letters received extending from 1791 to 1868, and a few volumes of letters sent between 1814 and the latter date. Since 1869, however, the correspondence has been carefully preserved. Of other material the office possesses an enormous mass of miscellaneous papers, accounts, check stubs, certificates of deposit, journals, ledgers, transcripts from assistant treasurers and national banks, daily reports of movements of standard silver dollars, and many other classes of documents.

In the office of the Comptroller of the Treasury is to be found a file of sixty-two volumes containing the decisions of the Second Comptroller from 1817 to 1894, when that office was abolished. Unfortunately the decisions of the First Comptroller were not preserved in any separate series although many of them have been published. Since the reorganization of the office in 1894, the decisions of the Comptroller have been published and regular files of the correspondence have been maintained.

The offices of the various Auditors contain, of course, the adjusted accounts of the executive offices. This material is mainly administrative and only the most specialized investigations in it would be at all fruitful. As may be imagined the extent of it is formidable. In the office of the Auditor for the War Department it has been estimated that the records cover over ten miles of shelving, and this showing would probably be duplicated if not bettered in any of the other auditors' offices. Amidst such a mass of material several small groups of records seem to have a more special interest or value. In the office of the Auditor for the Treasury Department, for example, are the mileage accounts of members of Congress prior to 1894, the warrants for the pay-

ments for Louisiana, Alaska and the Philippines, and a small box of expense accounts and vouchers showing Washington's travelling and table expenses between 1775 and 1784. In the office of the Auditor for the War Department are to be found rolls of friendly Indians from 1818 to 1849, disbursement accounts of Grant, Lee, Davis, Sheridan and other officers, the records of the commissions for the settlement of claims arising from losses of property in the War of 1812 or from the frauds perpetrated in the Department of the West in 1861 and 1862, together with papers relating to the capture of Jefferson Davis and much other material. The office of the Auditor for the Interior Department contains the accounts connected with the administration of the public lands dating from 1832 with a few as early as 1817, Indian accounts from 1819, and pension accounts from 1789. In the office of the Auditor for the Navy Department are many pay and muster rolls of various vessels, together with accounts and correspondence relating to prize claims. The office of the Auditor for the Post Office Department contained, until their transfer to the Library of Congress within the last year, a large number of early ledgers and, of especial interest, the records of the Confederate Post Office Department.

The archives of the office of the Commissioner of Internal Revenue are in two groups: those from 1790 to 1818 constitute the records of the old office of the Commissioner of the Revenue and consist of seven volumes of the Commissioner's letters, among which are some few relating to the whiskey insurrection, a number of internal revenue bonds, and three volumes of Boston tax lists. The second group of archives includes the records from 1862 to the present time. These are regarded as confidential and are not accessible.

This may complete our brief survey of the archives of the Treasury Department. A number of offices remain but the records of some of them, as those of the Comptroller of the Currency or of the Secret Service Division, are regarded as confidential, while the records of the others are of small historical value.

In the Department of War, which we may next consider, we find a situation differing widely from either of the two that have just been described. Here the policy of concentrating the archives and bringing them under a single administration has been consistently pursued and there have been gathered together in the office of the Adjutant General practically all the records of the department that are of historical or personal value. Such military records also as are to be found in other departments have been transferred to the War Department in the purpose of collecting a complete body of military archives. Not only has all of this material been deposited in the Office of the Adjutant General but considerable progress has been made in arranging and cataloguing it. Indeed, there has already been prepared a card index to all the rolls on file, so that the complete military history of any soldier can at once be ascertained. The fact that this index comprises over fifty millions of cards will convey some notion of the extent of the material. It must, however, be a matter of the keenest regret that, notwithstanding the repeated recommendations of the War Department, Congress has failed to provide the accommodations and small force necessary to place these archives at the disposal of investigators. Until this is done the practice of the Department of restricting access to the documents to employees of the Department for official purposes only, and to restrict responses to inquiries to the giving of information respecting the

military history of individual soldiers, will be continued. The richness of the material thus withheld makes the situation especially tantalizing. Here are all the records of the volunteer and regular armies, the correspondence of the Secretary of War and of military officers, a large collection, though not complete, of Revolutionary records, the captured Confederate archives, and the records of the Freedman's Bureau and of the military districts during the period of Reconstruction.

A few offices in the War Department have retained certain of their records, some of which should be noted. In the office of the Inspector General are five volumes of interesting inspection reports between 1814 and 1836. The office of the Judge Advocate General contains the original proceedings of general courts-martial, the records of the Civil War Bureau of Military Justice, which include the full proceedings of the trial of the so-called Lincoln conspirators, and all papers relating to the titles of lands under the control of the War Department, except those in the District of Columbia. Of especial interest in the office of the Chief of Engineers is a collection of about fifty thousand maps, charts, field books, diaries and similar documents. Of both local and national interest are the so-called "old records of the City of Washington," which are found in the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, a branch of the City Engineer's office, and which include the proceedings and correspondence of the commissioners of public grounds and buildings of the city of Washington, commencing in 1791. The letters of L'Enfant, of Ellicott, of the two Kings, and of Washington respecting the laying out of the federal city are most interesting and I am glad to understand that this Society has undertaken the publication of the more important of them. Here are also the maps, plats, ledgers, account books

and other documents that constitute an important part of the archives of the District of Columbia. There remain to be mentioned among the archives of the Department of War only those of the Bureau of Insular Affairs. These include the records of the Philippine Insurrection, now in the course of being published, the records of the first occupation of Cuba, and an enormous amount of correspondence, accounts and other documents relating to the military government of our new possessions.

Turning now from the Department of War to that of the Navy, we find the situation as regards the use of the archives almost reversed. The naval archives are, of course, much less extensive than those of the military force branch; furthermore, because of the extremely technical character of the work of most of the bureaus in the Navy Department it results that the records easily of greatest historical value and in the majority of cases the only ones that the investigator is likely to wish to consult are those of the Secretary's Office, which are under the control of the Chief Clerk. These are well arranged in orderly series and access to them permitted with the greatest liberality. Unfortunately there are few records prior to 1800, the fire of that year having affected the Navy as well as the War Department. The files consist mainly of correspondence, letters received and letters sent, arranged in various series. In general, the letters received are the more valuable for they contain minutely detailed accounts of the operations of all our naval forces. There are in all over three thousand volumes of these letters. The largest single series is that of Officers' Letters, but it is also one of the least important, the letters relating mostly to petty or personal matters, such as furloughs, transfers, advances in pay, etc. More important are

the Masters' Letters, filling fifty volumes and extending from 1804 to 1837, which contain material relating to the Burr Conspiracy, operations on the lakes during the War of 1812, the capture of the *Frolic*, the cruise of the *Wasp*, and other matters of equal interest. A still more important series is that of Captains' Letters; while of equal value are series of letters from the various squadrons. In the letters from the African Squadron, for example, is much material bearing on the suppression of the slave trade; in those of the East Indian Squadron, on Perry's mission to Japan; in those of the Pacific Squadron, on the seizure of California; and in those of the Gulf Squadron, on Mexican and Cuban affairs. The series of letters sent correspond largely to the letters received, but are, of course, of not nearly so great an extent. A special series of papers of which mention should be made in passing relates to exploring expeditions. Here are included, for example, five volumes of letters relating to the South Sea expedition of 1836-1842, a volume on Lynch's expedition to the Dead Sea, two volumes on Rodgers's surveying expedition to the North Pacific, and the ship and ice journals of DeLong, in command of the ill-fated Polar expedition in the *Jeannette*.

The recent development of the Naval War Records Office and Library deserves especial notice in this survey. To its original function as a library was added that of editing the naval records of the Civil War, and it has gradually developed into the depository of a large amount of most valuable manuscript material bearing on naval history. Among its collections of personal papers should be noted those of Dahlgren, DuPont, Farragut and many officers of both the Union and Confederate navies. It has also two or three chests of papers relating to prisoners taken in the War

of 1812, and a letter book of the British Naval Commissioners from 1784 to 1790.

Next in importance to the two offices just mentioned is the Bureau of Navigation. The records here are of two sorts, those relating to the personnel and those relating to the movements of vessels. The former include a record or register of all orders sent to officers from 1798 to the present time, and a series of confidential reports of officers from 1846 to date. The latter class of records consists of the log-books of vessels, the file of which is nearly complete since 1816, but there are also many volumes of earlier date, though few if any prior to 1801. As a historical source these log-books are rather disappointing. In the preface to his "Naval War of 1812" Roosevelt refers to them as "exasperating, being often very incomplete," and cites as an illustration the log of the *United States* which does not, he says, contain a single fact about the engagement in which the *Macedonian* was captured.

The investigator whose interest is mainly in naval architecture will find the records of the Bureau of Construction and Repair of great value. They are in two main groups, of which the earlier, extending from 1815 to 1842, comprises the records of the Navy Commissioners. These consist of the correspondence, letters received and sent, and miscellaneous papers, such as muster-rolls, reports on the state and condition of naval vessels, rules and regulations of navy-yards, timber reports, provision accounts, reports on materials and labor in repairing vessels, monthly reports of contracts, etc. Unfortunately for the investigator the correspondence is preserved in a cellar of the Navy building, and the miscellaneous papers are nailed up in boxes in a vault at the Navy Yard. The later group of papers comprises the records of the Bureau since its

establishment in 1842 and consists of ships' surveys, specifications, contracts, records of the Board on Changes, etc., as well as the records of what was commonly called "Admiral Gregory's Office," which had charge of those vessels during the Civil War that were being constructed outside of navy-yards. Finally, among the archives of the Navy Department should be noted the records of courts-martial and boards of inquiry, which are complete since 1799 and are preserved in the office of the Judge Advocate General, and the records of the Marine Corps, which, owing to lack of space, are boxed up and kept in the Marine Barracks, and are hence unavailable for purposes of investigation.

The more important archives of the Department of Justice are kept in the office of the Chief Clerk of that Department and are in two distinct groups, those prior to the establishment of the Department in 1870 being in one, and the records subsequent to that date being in the other. The earlier records are those of the old Attorney General's Office. There are several hundred boxes of original letters and papers received, which have only recently been given any arrangement. They extend from 1809, but those prior to 1830 are very few in number. The volumes of letters sent and of opinions are complete since 1817, but until that date no attempt had been made to preserve any records. In the earliest volume is to be found a note by Attorney General Wirt to the effect that upon assuming the duties of his office he found not a scrap of paper in the form of records of what his predecessors had done, conceiving such a neglect to be especially unfortunate in a branch of the government where consistency of action was of prime importance, he announced his determination of commencing thereupon the keeping of regular records, a resolve which he at once put into practice

although it at first made it necessary for him to copy out his letters in the huge ledger volumes himself. The records of the Department of Justice since 1870 have been kept in various series of letters sent and letters received. They include correspondence with the President and members of the Cabinet, with court officers, marshals, district attorneys, and the general public. The historical value of these archives is very considerable: admiralty cases in time of war; labor troubles, when recourse is had to federal courts; provisions of state constitutions, when their legality under the United States Constitution is involved; and matters of similar importance are all treated.

The records of the separate bureaus of the Department of Justice are not among the archives just described but are maintained independently. Thus in the office of the Attorney in Charge of Pardons we find the records of all executive pardons, except those in the Army and Navy, granted since 1852, the earlier records being kept in the Department of State; and in the office of the Appointment Clerk are the papers relating with the appointments to the somewhat over fifteen hundred offices connected with the federal judiciary.

The extent of the archives of the Post Office Department is formidable in the extreme. The records of the Postmaster General and of the four Assistant Postmasters General are kept separately, and the subdivision in some cases carried further. Large as the present building of the department is, there is yet not enough room for the records. The eighth floor is nearly filled with them and probably as many more are kept in the storage warehouse on E Street which has already been mentioned as the receptacle for sections of the archives of the Treasury Department. The

crowding would be infinitely worse were it not that in many series only current records are preserved, the files being destroyed after a period of five or seven years. It is without hesitation that the historical investigator selects the letter books of the Postmaster General as the most promising source of valuable material. They form a series of over one hundred volumes commencing in 1789, and the chief value of the material in them lies in its bearing on social history. Especially interesting are the letters prior to 1850 in which may be read the story of westward expansion. Supplementing these volumes are those containing the orders of the Postmaster General and the records of the appointments of postmasters and the establishment of post offices. Unfortunately the fire of 1836 has deprived us of this latter material prior to that year.

The local independence of the archives of the Department of the Interior is complete. Here every bureau, and in some cases every division of a bureau, preserves its own records. Of the archives of the Office of the Secretary those that are maintained in the Patents and Miscellaneous Division may best receive our attention. Here are the papers relating to the administration of the territories since 1873, the corresponding records prior to that date being filed, it will be remembered, in the Bureau of Rolls and Library of the Department of State. Here also is a small group of papers extending from 1854 to 1872 relating to the suppression of the slave trade and to several attempts at negro colonization, especially those to found a colony on Ile à Vache. Of local interest are the fifteen boxes of papers relating to the administration of the penitentiary and jail in the District of Columbia from 1821 to 1878, and a considerable amount of correspondence and other material relating to the

construction and alteration of public buildings within the District.

In the office of Indian Affairs some of the early material is still in a state of confusion owing to its having been transferred from the War Department, which originally had supervision of Indian affairs, in 1849, when the Department of the Interior was established. There is, however, a continuous series of letters received from 1800 to the present time, the method of filing changing in 1880. There are letters from Indian agents or other officials of the bureau service, officers in the army, territorial officials, and Indians themselves, these last being picturesque if not historically of great value. The letters sent are arranged from 1800 in various series and of course deal with all aspects of Indian administration, such matters as trade, the removal of the Indians beyond the Mississippi, education, affairs of the Creeks and Cherokees, or claims holding prominent places.

In the General Land Office every division has its own files and as all the divisions are badly crowded the records have to be kept in cellars or attics or wherever else room can be found for them. In the Recorder's Division are complete records of all public land patents although the original papers prior to 1814 were destroyed in the fire of that year. In the Public Lands Division are kept the "tract books" which show the history of every surveyed subdivision of the public lands, while in the Division of Public Surveys is a vast amount of correspondence, dating from 1796, relating to the surveying of the public lands, their natural features, the opposition frequently encountered in making the survey, and similar matters. In the files of the Railroads Division is much material dating from 1829 relating to the development of canals

and railroads, the railroad files commencing in 1850. Finally should be noted the drafting Division where are preserved the files of maps.

Of the remaining offices in the Department of the Interior, those of the Bureau of Education and of the Geological survey may be passed over with bare mention because their archives are for the most part published. The same is true of the Patent Office, but the Bureau of Pensions may detain us for a moment. We are not concerned, however, with its almost endless files of accepted, pending, or rejected claims, but with a little body of material that has been segregated from the files of the Old War and Navy Division. This consists for the most part of Revolutionary diaries, orderly books, rolls, account books, letters, and similar documents which have been filed with claims, at one time or another, as evidence. Their value varies considerably but taken together they constitute an interesting group.

Sufficient investigation of the archives of the Department of Agriculture has not as yet been made to admit of a general description or an estimate of their value. While the voluminous publications of the department contain much material for the economic investigator, it is probable that the unprinted documents will be found to be of interest. Such, at least, is true of the Secretary's correspondence, which is complete since 1872 (the department was organized in 1863) and which has been carefully indexed since 1894. The letters bear on such subjects as the importation of American food products into foreign countries, the construction of the laws relating to animal diseases, irrigation and internal improvements, settlement on public lands, etc.

Of the records of the more recently established bu-

reaus of the Department of Commerce and Labor but little is to be said. Those of the Bureau of Corporations, for example, are considered as confidential; as are also the unpublished files of the Bureau of Labor. In the office of Steamboat Inspection the records are of very technical character, but those of the Office of the Commissioner of Navigation are of more interest, especially the series of "marine documents" which date from 1815 and show the ownership, model, and time and place of construction of all registered vessels. The files of the Bureau of Immigration are complete since 1891 and are admirably arranged. They consist of packets of papers relating to the individual cases that arise for decision under the immigration laws. The material in the Coast and Geodetic Survey, while largely technical as would be expected still contains much of general interest, such as the Hassler letters extending from 1803 to 1843 and relating to the early history of the Survey; a series of over seventy volumes labelled "War and Navy Assistants," comprising correspondence bearing on military affairs during the Civil War, and a collection of several thousand manuscript maps, commencing in 1835. It is probable, however, that the Bureau of the Census possesses the most valuable body of historical material in the Department of Commerce and Labor, namely the original census schedules. These were formerly in the Patents and Miscellaneous Division of the Department of the Interior, and have been only recently transferred to the Census Office. They commence with the schedules of the first census in 1790 and include all the censuses to the present time. Unfortunately many early volumes are missing but commencing with 1830 the schedules are reasonably complete. There are in all, exclusive of the unbound schedules of the last two censuses,

about 4,600 volumes. These, of course, contain the detailed data from which the printed summaries have been compiled; thus, for example, in the schedules of the first census, if we take the reports for any given town, we find the names of heads of families, the number of members, with sex and approximate age of each, in each family, the number of slaves, etc. As the enumerator in most cases probably went from house to house it becomes possible to ascertain who were the neighbors of any given family. Access to these records is at present restricted to the employees of the bureau, but queries from investigators are readily answered. The schedules of the first census are being printed, and it is to be hoped that publication can continue until at least the earlier material is thus made accessible.

While the two permanent commissions for Civil Service and Interstate Commerce do not belong to any of the executive departments, they are a part of the executive branch of the government and as such should receive mention in this survey. The records of the Civil Service Commission are mainly administrative in character but in the proceedings and the correspondence, both complete since 1883, the student of executive and congressional patronage would doubtless find much of interest. The archives of the Interstate Commerce Commission consist of the correspondence, of which there is a complete and well-indexed file from 1887; the series of informal complaints which are those cases where the Commission, acting as an intermediary rather than as a tribunal, secures an accommodation between the parties; the formal complaints, which are the records of all cases that are tried before the Commission; a series of over five million railroad tariffs, monthly reports of accidents, considered confidential; and a collection of miscellaneous papers and reports, much of which is printed.

With this then may end our account of the executive archives. Hasty and summary as has been the review, omitting much that is worthy of note, it is yet hoped that it has directed attention to the diversity, value and formidable extent of this material, and especially that it has made clear the urgent need of providing for its collection and organization, and of administering it as a body of archives, not merely as the business records of so many offices. Already there have been irreparable losses and we have little reason to feel assured that there may not be others. The present is none too soon to attempt the solution of a problem which daily becomes more complicated and more pressing.